GUESTS: Senator ARLEN SPECTER, (R-PA)

Dr. JAMES DOBSON
Founder, Focus on the Family

KAREN TUMULTY
Time Magazine

MODERATOR: BOB SCHIEFFER - CBS News
Today on FACE THE NATION, the debate over stem cell research. What's it all about? The death of President Reagan has reignited the debate over stem cell research. Three years ago, President Bush placed limits on this embryonic cell research, which some scientists say has the potential to save millions of lives. Nancy Reagan supports the research because she believes it could help in the treatment of Alzheimer's, which President Reagan suffered from. Today, we'll explore the issue with Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family, who believes embryos should not be used for research, and Republican Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, who is leading the effort in the Senate to further the research. Karen Tumulty of Time magazine joins in the questioning. We'll have a 50th anniversary Flashback this morning on the American hostages in Iran. And then I'll have a final word on what Ronald Reagan taught us. But first, stem cell research on FACE THE NATION.


SCHIEFFER: And good morning again.

Well, what do we mean when we talk about stem cell research? Basically this. When a woman wishes to conceive a child through in vitro fertilization, doctors remove several of her unfertilized eggs. These are then mixed with sperm cells in a lab. Once they are fertilized, one of the eggs is then returned to the uterus. The other fertilized eggs are frozen or discarded. Scientists wants to use these surplus embryos to extract stem cells for research. That destroys the embryo, which is about the size of a pencil point, and that is what makes the procedure controversial. Some pro-life groups believe that amounts to abortion.

There are several hundred thousand of these stem cells stored in fertility clinics around the country, but under current government policy, scientists who receive government funding cannot use them. These cells can be used to repair organs damaged by injury or disease and they hold a promise for helping people with Parkinson's, diabetes and Alzheimer's.

Last month at a dinner for the Diabetes Foundation, Nancy Reagan said it is time to change government policy and make it possible for government-funded scientists to use these cells.

Mrs. NANCY REAGAN: (From videotape) I just don't see how we can turn our backs on this. There are so many diseases that can be cured or at least helped. We've lost so much time already, and I just really can't bear to lose anymore.

SCHIEFFER: Mrs. Reagan's call has revived efforts in Congress to relax government rules on the research but it has also rekindled the opposition of pro-life groups, including some of the late president's closest friends.

Well, today, to get a better understanding of what this is all about, we're going to talk to Republican Senator Arlen Specter, who has long favored stem cell research, and Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family, who opposes it. Joining in the questioning this morning, Karen Tumulty of Time magazine.

Senator Specter, where is this issue now in Congress? Clearly Mrs. Reagan's call has revived efforts to relax the rules. Where does it go from here?

Senator ARLEN SPECTER (Republican, Pennsylvania): Fifty-eight senators recently signed a letter to the president, joined by members of the House of Representatives, some 200 strong, to ask the president to change the policy or to expand the policy. Bear this in mind, Bob.
Back in August of 2001, President Bush acknowledged the propriety of using stem cells for saving lives when he authorized the use of federal funding for some 63 lines, now increased to more than 70, but we have found that only a few of them are really workable. They're tainted. And now the time has come--my subcommittee has had 14 hearings on this subject since December of 1998 when stem cells burst on the scene. And what we need now is to have more stem cell lines available because the ones authorized by President Bush are--are insufficient.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, let's ask Dr. Dobson. Dr. Dobson, why do you think this is not a good idea?

Dr. JAMES DOBSON (Founder, Focus on the Family): Well, Bob, it's very important to clarify what we're talking about here because we strongly support stem cell research, adult stem cell research. That is the source of great hope with regard to diseases. In fact, all around the world, people have been treated already with adult stem cells and have been benefited. There are some that even have been cured of diabetes. So that's where the hope is. What is not being said--and, in fact, there's a di--a surprising degree of dishonesty here--is that the embryonic stem cell research has not proved to be therapeutic. And as a matter of fact, the--the stem cell--the embryonic stem cells have a tendency to create tumors. And there's not one human being anywhere in the world that's being treated with them. There's not one clinical trial going on now with regard to these cells, and so there's a great deal of confusion about the difference between these two types of cells. And, frankly, I think the media and the--some in--some politicians and others are deliberately distorting that information so the American people won't understand it.

SCHIEFFER: Karen.

Ms. KAREN TUMULTY (Time Magazine): And--and yet, Dr. Dobson, there--the most recent research does suggest that there are some places, however, where adult stem cells don't work. In April, Stanford announced that, for instance, it doesn't work with heart disease, and as recently as last month, researchers at Harvard said that it doesn't help with juvenile diabetes. Do you think that--that embryonic stem cells should even be not used in these cases, with these specific diseases where researchers do think they have potential?

Dr. DOBSON: Well, from what I read, they do not think that. What I've read just recently is that not in our lifetime will Alzheimer's be treated successfully with embryonic stem cells. I mean, they're just not--we can't even use them to try them. Why--what the researchers want is the money for basic research, but not for therapeutic purposes. So when Nancy Reagan, whom I respect highly, and--and others come out, Christopher Reeve and others with this--this false hope, which frankly The Weekly Standard called a scandal, the way it's being presented, and--and other researchers are saying the same thing. We really need to clarify what we're talking about.

SCHIEFFER: Well, Senator Specter, what would be your response to that?

Sen. SPECTER: Well, I strongly disagree with that accusation of dishonesty and saying that the politicians are distorting it. My subcommittee has had 14 hearings, and we have had over overwhelming evidence that these stem cells can have a tremendous impact on Parkinson's and juvenile diabetes and we ought to give scientists a free hand. The real pro-life position here, Bob and Karen, is to use these stem cells. We have 400,000 of them which are frozen. They're going to be discarded--as you noted, Bob, in your introduction, discarded, thrown away. So the pro-life position and the pro-family position is to use them.

SCHIEFFER: Look here. We've had efforts to stifle science over the years, over the centuries. Pope
Boniface the ace-VIII stopped the use of cadavers, which set back medical research 300 years. Galileo was imprisoned because he agreed with the Copernicus theory that the world was round. These adult stem cells ought to be used, as are blood cord stem cells, but these embryonic stem cells, backed up by an overwhelming weight of medical and scientific opinion, have tremendous potential to cure many, many maladies—heart disease, cancer, you name it.

Ms. TUMULTY: A—although Senator Specter, a lot of researchers would agree with the point that Dr. Dobson just made, which is that stem cells have not shown as much promise with Alzheimer's, the disease that was so much in the news this week, that in fact the—the—the research they're looking into suggests therapeutic cloning, actually creating new embryos to treat Alzheimer's is—is the direction that they would like to head. Are you comfortable with that, because that does go closer to, I think, a moral line for a lot of Americans?

Sen. SPECTER: Well, The Washington Post had an extensive article this week, raising a question as to whether stem cells would be useful on Alzheimer's. But even in that article, there was a difference of opinion. Look here, science has tremendous unknown bounds. You just can't tie the hands of scientists.

Ms. TUMULTY: But would...

Sen. SPECTER: And the—the word 'therapeutic cloning' is—is misused. That—that is an effort to try to get this kind of a procedure allied to human cloning, which I'm totally against.

Ms. TUMULTY: But how far...

Dr. DOBSON: Karen...

Ms. TUMULTY: How far do you...

Dr. DOBSON: Karen...

Ms. TUMULTY: ...want the president to go in loosening these restrictions? Do you think he ought to also allow cloning?

Sen. SPECTER: I have co-sponsored legislation with Senator Hatch, by the way, a very strong pro-life senator, to let science run its course. You have a procedure known as nuclear transplantation, which I think has the potential to be tremendously effective.

SCHIEFFER: Dr. Dobson, let me just cut to the chase here. What would be your reaction if the White House does decide to change its policy and to relax these rules on stem cell research? Would you—what—what would you do?

Dr. DOBSON: Well, we'd be very concerned about that, Bob. But I--I would like to comment on what the senator just...

SCHIEFFER: All right.

Dr. DOBSON: ...said, because he—he said he wants to let science—scientists go, apparently to do anything they want to. You know, science has always been governed by ethics. It has to be. It always has, except during the Nazi era when, as we know, unbelievable things occurred in concentration camps because they were not governed by ethics. There have always been things we could have done but don't do. I mean, you can—you can bring a child to full term and—and delivery and then take those organs. Are we going to stop there? I--
would like to point out that in 19--in 2001, July the 8th, on this program, Senator Specter said, ‘I certainly would never agree to destroying a stem cell if there was any chance at all’--any chance at all, he said--‘that the embryo would turn into a human being.’ I wonder if the senator has waffled on that issue.

SCHIEFFER: Senator?

Sen. SPECTER: Well, I--well, I haven't waffled on it. And, as a matter of fact, I've taken the lead in the Appropriations Committee to put up $1 million for embryo adoption. And I have said consistently that if these embryos can be turned into life, that is their highest form, and I'd be all for it. But you have 400,000, and they aren't possibly going to be used to turn into life. And when this comment is made about what went on in Nazi Germany, you couldn't have a bigger red herring than that. And when this argument is made about taking organs from children, that's got nothing to do with what we're talking about.

Look here, President Bush, who has very strong ethical lines, as does Arlen Specter, has said that stem cell research is OK when he liberated more than 60, later increased to 70, stem cells lines back in Sep--August of 19--of 2001. So we're not going to cross any ethical lines. If you talk about human cloning, obviously we're not going to do that.

SCHIEFFER: Oh, well, Dr. Dobson--go ahead. Did you want to respond to this?

Dr. DOBSON: Well, yeah. What--what the senator said here, again, is just not quite accurate. The--what the president did was authorize research on a--a certain line--67 lines of embryonic stem cells that n--had no potential for life, that were already essentially dead, even though they could be manipulated. And I--with regard to all those--all those cells--those embryos that are going to be discarded, 97 percent of the parents of those embryos will not release them for scientific research. That's already been tried. And of the 3 percent, there are babies being born every few days--they're called snowflake babies--that come from those frozen embryos. I held one of those little girls on my lap, a little girl named Hannah, who sat and sang "Jesus Loves the Little Children" that came from those very cells that the--that the--the senator wants to destroy.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you this, Dr. Dobson: Is the real issue here whether scientists should be able to make human embryos from scratch? If the rules were such that they barred reproductive cloning, if that were to happen, would you be agreeable to using frozen embryos for research?

Dr. DOBSON: I--I would not because the embryo is embryonic human life and we would not favor anything that kills human life. And, you know, President Reagan is being lau--lauded this week for his position on, his support for life con--from conception to the grave. That's the way we feel about it. So in addition to all the scientific information that says this is not a good idea and where it leads, which is to unthinkable things--you know, in the state of California right now, they're--they're floating a bond issue th--that is going to try to create--or raise $3 billion to, in fact, create embryos for the purpose of using them scientifically. Where is that going?

SCHIEFFER: Well...

Dr. DOBSON: We're a better nation than that.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me just go back to a question I asked you back toward the beginning when I said if the president did relax these rules, what would be your reaction, you'd say--you said you would be very concerned. But what would you do beyond that? Would you
then oppose the president? Would you tell your people to stay home and not vote? Where would this issue come down in this coming presidential campaign for you?

Dr. DOBSON: Well, at the very least, we would be very disappointed, just like we are right now with 58 senators and about 200 congressmen who have crossed the line here. With regard to the president, I can’t say where that would go. I--I don’t believe he’s going to do that. In fact, Laura Bush--we’re doing a lot of talking about Nancy Reagan, but Laura Bush just came out opposing embryonic stem cell research. And I don’t believe she would have done that if the president intended to reverse his policy.

Ms. TUMULTY: And--and...

Dr. DOBSON: In fact, I--I--I believe--fully believe he's not going to do that.

Ms. TUMULTY: But--and yet you mentioned this California ballot initiative. The fact is that not only is California talking about this, but New Jersey, Harvard University. Since the president put the ban in effect, there have been something like 200 stem cell lines created around the world and in this country with private money. Do you really think...

Dr. DOBSON: Yeah.

Ms. TUMULTY: ...that this--that this federal ban is going to stop the use of stem cells?

Dr. DOBSON: No. No, it's not, Karen. And we would hope that it would, but it--it isn't. The interesting thing is that the private research is going into the adult stem--stem cell research. It is not flowing in large numbers into the embryonic stem cell research. And that's why this--there's so much pressure on Congress. Now follow the money.

SCHIEFFER: Yes.

Dr. DOBSON: You know, follow the money. The people that are demanding this are not expecting to solve the problem of Alzheimer’s. They are using a grieving widow to try to make this case to the American people. But they know better than that.

SCHIEFFER: Let me...

Dr. DOBSON: What they're trying to do is get a huge amount of federal money for basic research.

Sen. SPECTER: In answer--in answer...

SCHIEFFER: Let me--let me just get in here and ask Senator Specter, where is this going to go? Can you legislate a change here, Senator Specter?

Sen. SPECTER: Yes.

SCHIEFFER: You have these senators on board now. You have 200 members of Congress. What can we expect to happen?

Sen. SPECTER: Bob, a--a change can be legislated. But we really want to work it out with the president on a--on a conciliatory basis if we possibly can. And I--and I think we can based upon what President Bush did in August of 2001. When--when the contention is made that these embryos constitute life, how--how can you deal then with the fact that they're going to be discarded? They're going to be--they're going to be thrown away?
Mr. DOBSON: And...

Sen. SPECTER: If they were to produce life, it would be one thing. And when--when the statement is made of disappointment with 58 United States senators and 200 members of the House of Representatives, we have opinions, and we have judgments, and we have made those opinions and judgements based upon a lot of study--as I say, 14 hearings in my subcommittee. We've heard many, many witnesses who--who back up the use of embryonic stem cells as--as flexible cells to really do a tremendous amount of good.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Gentlemen, we're going to have to stop there.

Dr. DOBSON: That's...

SCHIEFFER: The clock has run out. Our--our purpose today was to try to lay out the issues here and get some sense of where this stands and what's going to happen. I think we did that.

We'll be back in a moment with another FACE THE NATION 50th anniversary flashback. Thank you both.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Twenty-four years ago this month, President Jimmy Carter was deep in the Iran hostage crisis that would plague his presidency. That is this week's FACE THE NATION 50th anniversary Flashback.

When President Carter came on FACE THE NATION in June of 1980, he was somberly honest about the hostages being held this Iran.

(Excerpt from June 1980)

Unidentified Man: Do you still consider it a crisis, Mr. President? I notice, looking through transcripts, that some months ago every time you had visitors to the White House you mentioned the subject and brought it up yourself. Now it seems to me you mention it somewhat less or volunteer the subject somewhat less. Is it still a crisis?

Pres. CARTER: Yes.

Unidentified Man: Should we still be saying on the air every day, 'Day a hundred and--200' or whatever it is?

Pres. CARTER: Yes.

Unidentified Man: Should we still be flying flags at half-mast, tying yellow ribbons? Is it still a crisis in other words?

Pres. CARTER: It's still a crisis.

Unidentified Woman: Why don't you talk about it?

Pres. CARTER: There is never any time in my da--in my day's work that I'm not aware of the fact that 53 American hostages are being held as an act of international terrorism by the people, government and the terrorists in Iran.
(End of excerpt)

SCHIEFFER: The crisis continued for another seven months before the hostages were released...

President RONALD REAGAN: I, Ronald Reagan...

SCHIEFFER: ...the same day that Ronald Reagan was sworn in as president. Another FACE THE NATION 50th anniversary Flashback.

And I'll be back with a final word.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, we spent all week thinking about Ronald Reagan, and that was a good thing. He was our president for eight years. He helped restore our national confidence when it was fading. When he left Washington, we didn't understand that the Soviet Union was so near collapse. Now we can see how the policy he put in place helped to bring down an enemy that for nearly half a century had the means to destroy us and all civilization. Reason enough to remember him.

But there is one more thing to think about. This week of tribute to Ronald Reagan was a refreshing respite in a presidential campaign that began too soon and has grown increasingly bitter when the country is already more polarized than ever. What Reagan showed us, what today's politicians would do well to remember, is that it is possible to have differences without hating those on the other side; that winning an argument does not have to mean destroying your opponent. Somehow that's been lost in today's mean politics. Years of negative campaigns conducted almost exclusively by 30-second television ads have gridlocked our political process and made the compromises necessary to govern all but impossible. Worse, it has soured our politics to the point that too many people no longer want anything to do with it.

The lesson from Ronald Reagan is that his way did work. If our politicians would remember only that about him, the level of our political dialogue would rise and campaigns would again become interesting, perhaps even relevant to solving the problems of our times.

That's it for us. We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.